

# The Friends of The Ridgeway

## Christmas E-Newsletter, 2015

From The Chairman,

Dear Friends

In October, when I sat down to write a Chairman's letter for the Autumn Newsletter, the weather, as I recollect, was fine autumn sunshine and we were about to go away on holiday. Today, as I sit down to write for the Winter Newsletter, we are about to enjoy a holiday once again, albeit of home, family, friends and fireside, but regrettably there does not seem to be much chance of enjoying fine autumn weather. However, one thing has not changed – learning about the Ridgeway trail and the Friends of the Ridgeway as well as becoming involved in various activities, and continuing to enjoy forays on the trail.



One very pleasant recent activity was to attend the Vale of White Horse Local Group evening meeting. It was a superb evening – meeting old and new friends, listening to an excellent talk on the Archaeology of Stanford-in-the-Vale and enjoying tea and home-made cake. If you can get to the Vale of White Horse Local Group I can most enthusiastically recommend it.

In my last letter, I noted that the Friends of the Ridgeway, formally constituted in 1983, had a general objective of protecting the trail particularly from the recreational use of motor vehicles, particularly off-road motor bikes and 4x4s. Additionally the future of the trail was being secured by the formation of the Ridgeway Partnership; this is an association of all stakeholders along the route, both local authorities and user groups, with funding for maintenance and development coming from Natural England and the various County Councils. Having been largely successful in combatting off-roaders and with the birth of the Ridgeway Partnership, both of these objectives have been achieved.

With this background, clearly the association must consider its future objectives. This debate was the main issue discussed at our Committee Meeting in October.



It could be argued that the Association might wind up now that we have joined the Ridgeway Partnership,. We need to be sure that there is still a worth-while role for us, and to define that role.

On the Ridgeway Partnership, the Friends of the Ridgeway are the only Partner focussed exclusively on The Ridgeway, and on the whole of it, not one section. We are also the only Partner representing the public interest at large in The Ridgeway, and not a particular activity interest. Our charitable objectives extend to the whole ancient Ridgeway, not just to the National Trail, so we should retain an interest in The Great Stones Way as well as any future extension of the path. It was also noted that protecting The Ridgeway could be an issue if the Partnership were to lose grant support.

Whilst we are and must continue as active members of the Ridgeway Partnership, the Friends of the Ridgeway should not be subsumed within the Partnership but should retain our independence and freedom to act where we see fit to preserve the Ridgeway.



The Ridgeway is a wonderful resource for all the communities that live along its route as well as for the wider community; this resource must be preserved and protected for future generations and its benefits brought to the attention of as many people as possible. This was agreed as the past, present and continuing future role of The Friends of The Ridgeway. Our charitable Objects and Mission Statement, etc., remain valid, and our role of protecting The Ridgeway for future generations, now as a member of the Ridgeway Partnership, remains as worth-while as ever.



The Friends of the Ridgeway has benefited recently from a generous donation and bequest. The plan is to use these funds to fund an annual arts prize as a means to attract public interest in the Ridgeway. The scheme has not been progressed due to uncertainty by the Ridgeway Partnership as to its future events but will be progressed in the coming weeks.

The festivities now call; I hope that weather will not inhibit our traditional Boxing Day walk.

Anthony Burdall,

## The Ridgeway Partnership

The Partnership Board met in Wantage on 7<sup>th</sup> December, its fourth meeting but the first south of the Thames. We hope that the pattern of varying meetings between venues along the whole length of the Trail will continue. The meeting was held in the excellent facilities offered by The Beacon community centre, and advantage was taken of that location for Ian Ritchie, as Chairman of the Partnership, and other members to call upon the Mayor, Councillor Dickson, and the Town Clerk of Wantage, and to brief them on the Partnership's plans for the management and maintenance of The Ridgeway and intention to work closely with Wantage and other communities in its promotion and development. We were warmly received and look forward to a close future liaison.



The Partnership's plans are increasingly focussing on the strategic links and access paths between The Ridgeway and the towns and villages along its length, where the pubs and B&Bs, and other services, are located. The Ridgeway is seen as comprising not just the Trail itself, but its local environment and what is known as its benefit corridor. The importance of convenient access and good signage to ease the way between The Ridgeway and local services and other

attractions for the visitor, and of course vice versa, is now being recognised and will be addressed. The first projects are being worked up, and outlines have been submitted to funding organisations for consideration.

The Partnership is also seeking to build contacts with the organisers of sporting and charity events on The Ridgeway with a view to ensuring that these have the facilities needed by participants and on-lookers and that they pass off with minimum interference with other users. The effective maintenance of The Ridgeway remains of course an over-riding priority.



The five themes identified by the Partnership for promotion naturally also include the ancient heritage of The Ridgeway, and an initial survey for this is to be launched in the Chilterns. Environmental protection is also a concern, and it is hoped to identify a scheme for a bio-diversity corridor. A potential programme to celebrate the creative inspiration of The Ridgeway and to encourage artists in a wide range of fields is of particular interest to your Committee, and we shall bring you further news of this in due course.

Jeff Goddard

## Annual General Meeting – A Reminder

The AGM will take place on Sunday, 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2016. The venue and other arrangements will be announced as soon as possible in the New Year. All Trustees are subject to re-election at the AGM, and there are a number of vacancies to be filled. If you can volunteer your time and skills, and would like to contribute towards the objectives of the Association, please get in touch with the Secretary.

## The Chilterns

Our traditional focus on the great sweep of The Ridgeway above the Vale of White Horse should be matched by an appreciation of the different but equally attractive sections along the length of the Chilterns. The landscape here was designated as an AONB in 1965, with the bulk of the area stretching from south of Dunstable to the Thames and the outskirts of Reading. The countryside here is more wooded and broken than the North Wessex Downs escarpment, and more domestic in scale. The Trail too is predominantly footpath instead of the continuous byway south of the Thames, and it runs closer to and sometimes through the settlements, with pubs and B&Bs more frequent and accessible.



The Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) is the public body established to conserve and enhance the Chilterns AONB, and they have been our close and active partner in the launch of the Ridgeway Partnership, alongside the Chiltern Society, also established in 1965. Both organisations celebrated their half-century this year. Together they provide an unrivalled infrastructure of support and encouragement for appreciation and

preservation of the area. CCB initiatives in recent years include their highly successful Chilterns Commons scheme; the Chilterns Box Woodland Project; the Countryside and Food Festival, jointly with the National Trust; the Chilterns Chalk Streams project with the Wild Trout Trust, and the Buildings Design Awards with the Chilterns Society. CCB publishes a regular Archaeology and History Newsletter, working with local societies, and in 2013 set up the Chilterns Hill Forts Project to survey the 20 known sites in the Chilterns, alongside the Atlas of Hillforts scheme led by Prof Gary Lock, whose work at Marcham is so well-known to our members.

The Chiltern Society, for its part, is very active in conservation across the Chilterns, mobilising 500 volunteers to work on the 12 nature reserves and heritage sites that it owns or manages for local Councils, and the many miles of footpaths and byways that it maintains, including its own Chilterns Way and now The Ridgeway. Its wide-ranging activities include its many conservation groups, including Rivers and Wetlands, Heritage, Woodlands, and more; activities groups for Photography, Cycling and Walks; and a



comprehensive network of Planning Field Officers monitoring planning applications and development. Their Donate-a Gate scheme is an example for many to follow. Both the Society and CCB have run a vigorous campaign to minimise the impact of HS2 on the AONB.



We have been very grateful for the strong support given by both bodies to the new Ridgeway Partnership, and for their active promotion of The Ridgeway, and have much enjoyed getting to know them better. They have recently signed an Accord to work closer together, of which support to the Partnership is an early example.